

Reptiles and Amphibians Part 3 (Video Transcript)

Susan Watson: *[With a hissing snake]* And this is all a big bluff *[Laughs]*. This is called a Hog-nosed snake. This one is not a venomous snake like a Copperhead - even though it may look like its dangerous – especially that bluff it just did. This one is used to people, this kind of snake usually goes through a whole act of bluffing.

Narrator: The fearsome looking Hog-nosed snake is Virginia's best actor. Putting on a show guaranteed to frighten off most predators. If spreading his hood, hissing, and striking doesn't scare you away, plan B is to roll over and play dead. Once the coast is clear he'll again roll over and crawl away. There are three species of venomous snakes in Virginia – the Copperhead, the Cottonmouth, and the Timber Rattlesnake. These species all play a valuable roll in the ecosystem and should be left alone as they're normally not aggressive towards humans. The Copperhead is the only venomous snake found throughout all of Virginia. They can be recognized by their copper-colored head and the hour-glass pattern on their bodies. The Timber rattler is only found in remote areas, like this rocky outcropping in Virginia's western mountains. Amazingly, an isolated population of rattlers also exists in a small area of eastern Virginia. This group is known as Canebrake rattlesnakes. Department biologists trying to protect this remnant population of eastern rattlers must brave over-grown, thick swamps and use special equipment to track and study these snakes.

Scott Goetz: Basically, because they are so cryptic and so hard to find we really can't study them without this equipment. Basically we do surgery on the animal and we implant a transmitter inside of them – it's about the size of a AA battery and has an antennae about the length of a foot. So we actually implant this transmitter inside of them and run the antennae up the side of their body then we suture them back up. We use this receiver to come out here and track the signal. So the transmitter that we're putting in the snake is always sending out a constant signal and we use the receiver to pick up that signal and locate where they are at. The antennae just amplifies the signal that's being sent out and it has a range of about four or five hundred yards maximum. And with this we're able to tell, you know, as we approach when we're two meters from the snake – we are able to tell that, you know, we can get a direction and then we do just pretty much stand there and stare until we can actually see the snake. There is a lot of times were, you know, I come up and I know its dead in front of me and its three meters ahead of me and I still have to stand there. That's one of the things that amazes most people when they come out to the site is to stand there and have me tell them you know, once I finally see the snake, to say "Alright, the snake is, you know, its three meters ahead, its sitting right there, its underneath that branch." You know, just telling them exactly where it's at and it amazes them that they still have to stand there and stare for that long to just pick out the pattern.

Cameraman: Where is he?

Scott Goetz: He's dead ahead about three meters sitting in the leaf litter coiled up.

Cameraman: Ok, I'll see if I can find him here...

Scott Goetz: He's pretty bright, he stands out pretty well because he is freshly shed.

Cameraman: Oh, there he is.

Scott Goetz: That's a pretty decent sized male right there.

Narrator: Let's take a look at the camouflage on some other snakes. Now you see them, now you don't. Both reptiles and amphibians are important predators that help keep our ecosystem in balance by eating insects, rodents, and other small animals. The common American toad loves to feast on insects like ants. *[Reacting to the toad's tongue]* Whoa! Let's check that out in slow motion! The Black Rat snake is one of Virginia's most common snakes.

Susan: And a lot of these animals are actually good pest control – natural pest control.

Narrator: The Black snake, with its appetite for mice, is welcome in barns and out buildings throughout their range. The Black Rat snake uses constriction to quickly kill the mouse and then extends its jaws to swallow it whole.

Cub Scout: Oh my god!

Narrator: *[Laughs]* This one is very active.

Narrator: The big Pine snake, which lives in the western part of Virginia, wraps things up for the scouts.

Scout1: Well, I thought it was cool to see all the different salamanders because I really like salamanders and to learn about them. My favorite animal was the Tiger salamander because it was slimy and it has a cool pattern. When I go to my cousin's house we always go to like this little puddle and it has like thousands of salamanders.

Scout 2: I like the Albino salamander because it was white and had pink eyes.

Scout 3: I liked the Pine snake because it would hiss a lot and I just like snakes.

Narrator: Virginia has a rich diversity of reptiles and amphibians and has the diverse habitats to support them. Sixty-one species of reptiles live here, from sea turtles living off the Atlantic coast, to snakes living in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Seventy-four species of amphibians can be found in our state. Reptiles and amphibians need the right

combination of food, water, shelter, and space in order to exist. The Department of Game and Inland Fisheries is concerned about a third of Virginia's reptiles and amphibians because their habitats are disappearing or becoming polluted. Virginia's wildlife action plan will monitor their numbers and attempt to keep them from declining to the point when they can be considered endangered. The next time you take a look outside and find a reptile or amphibian in your backyard, remember the important place these creatures have in the ecosystem, never disturb them but enjoy watching them from a distance.

[Music plays during a montage of various reptiles and amphibians]

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